A HOOSIER ROMANCE

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

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Mabelle J. Costello

to

Louise

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John Wolcott Adams

A HOOSIER ROMANCE

BY JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

JOHN WOLCOTT ADAMS

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TO
JESSE C. MILLIKAN

A HOOSIER ROMANCE

I HAIN'T no hand at tellin' tales,
Er spinnin' yarns, as the sailors say;
Someway o' 'nother, language fails
To slide fer me in the oily way
That *lawyers* has; and I wisht it would,
Fer I 've got somepin' that I call good;
But bein' only a country squire,
I 've learned to listen and admire,

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Ruther preferrin' to be addressed
Than talk myse'f—but I 'll do my best:—

Old Jeff Thompson—well, I 'll say,
Was the clos'test man I ever saw!—
Rich as cream, but the porest pay,
And the meanest man to work fer — La!
I 've knowed that man to work one
"hand"—
Fer little er nothin', you understand—
From four o'clock in the morning light
Tel eight and nine o'clock at night,
And then find fault with his appetite!

He 'd drive all over the neighberhood
To miss the place where a toll-gate stood,
And slip in town, by some old road
That no two men in the county knowed,
With a jag o' wood, and a sack o' wheat,
That would n't burn and you could n't eat!
And the trades he 'd make, 'll I jest de-
clare,
Was enough to make a preacher swear!
And then he 'd hitch, and hang about
Tel the lights in the toll-gate was blowed
out,
And then the turnpike he 'd turn in
And sneak his way back home ag'in!

Some folks hint, and I make no doubt,
That that 's what wore his old wife out —
Toilin' away from day to day
And year to year, through heat and cold.
Uncomplainin' — the same old way
The martyrs died in the days of old;
And a-clingin', too, as the martyrs done,
To one fixed faith, and her *only* one,—
Little Patience, the sweetest child
That ever wept unrickonciled,
Er felt the pain and the ache and sting
That only a mother's death can bring.

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Patience Thompson!—I think that name
Must a-come from a power above,
Fer it seemed to fit her jest the same
As a *gaiter* would, er a fine kid glove!
And to see that girl, with all the care
Of the household on her—I de-clare
It was *oudacious*, the work she 'd do,
And the thousand plans that she 'd putt
through;
And sing like a medder-lark all day long,
And drownd her cares in the joys o' song;

And *laugh* sometimes tel the farmer's
"hand,"
Away fur off in the fields, would stand
A-listenin', with the plow half drawn,
Tel the coaxin' echoes called him on;
And the furries seemed, in his dreamy
eyes,
Like footpaths a-leadin' to Paradise,
As off through the hazy atmosphere
The call fer dinner reached his ear.

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Now *love 's* as cunnin' a little thing
As a hummin'-bird upon the wing,
And as liable to poke his nose
Jest where folks would least suppose,—
And more 'n likely build his nest
Right in the heart you 'd leave unguessed,
And live and thrive at your expense—
At least, that 's *my* experience.

And old Jeff Thompson often thought,
In his se'fish way, that the quiet John
Was a stiddy chap, as a farm-hand *ought*
To always be,—fer the airliest dawn
Found John busy—and "*easy*," too,
Whenever his *wages* would fall due!—
To sum him up with a final touch,
He *eat* so little and *worked* so much,
That old Jeff laughed to hisse'f and said,
"He makes *me* money and airns his bread!"
But John, fer all of his quietude,
Would sometimes drap a word er so
That none but *Patience* understood,
And none but her was *meant* to know!—

Mayby at meal-times John would say,
As the sugar-bowl come down his way,
"Thanky, no; *my* coffee 's sweet
Enough fer *me!*" with sich conceit,
She 'd know at once, without no doubt,
He meant because *she* poured it out;
And smile and blush, and all sich stuff,
And ast ef it was "*strong* enough?"
And git the answer, neat and trim,
"It *could n't* be too 'strong' fer *him!*"

And so things went fer 'bout a year,
Tel John, at last, found pluck to go
And pour his tale in the old man's ear—
And ef it had been *hot lead*, I know
It could n't a-raised a louder fuss,
Ner a-riled the old man's temper wuss!
He jest *lit* in, and cussed and swore,
And lunged and rared, and ripped and tore,
And told John just to leave his door,
And not to darken it no more!

But Patience cried, with eyes all wet,
"Remember, John, and don't ferget,
Whatever comes, I love you yet!"
But the old man thought, in his se'fish way,
"I 'll see her married rich some day;
And *that*," thinks he, "is money fer *me*—
And my will 's *law*, as it ought to be!"

So when, in the course of a month er so,
A *widower*, with a farm er two,
Comes to Jeff's, w'y, the folks, you know,
Had to *talk*—as the folks 'll do:
It was the talk of the neighberhood--
Patience and *John*, and *their* affairs;—
And this old chap with a few gray hairs
Had "cut John out," it was understood.
And some folks reckoned "Patience, too,
Knowed what *she* was a-goin' to do—
It was *like* her—la! indeed!—
All *she* loved was *dollars* and *cents*—
Like old Jeff—and they saw no need
Fer *John* to pine at *her* negligence!"

But others said, in a *kinder* way,
They missed the songs she used to sing—
They missed the smiles that used to play
Over her face, and the laughin' ring
Of her glad voice—that *every*thing
Of her *old* se'f seemed dead and gone,
And this was the ghost that they gazed on!

Tel finally it was noised about
There was a *weddin'* soon to be
Down at Jeff's; and the "cat was out"
Shore enough!—'Ll the *Jee-mun-nee!*
It *riled* me when John told me so,—
Fer *I was* a *friend o' John's*, you know;
And his trimblin' voice jest broke in two--
As a feller's voice 'll sometimes do.—
And I says, says I, "Ef I know my biz—
And I think I know what *jestice* is,—
I 've read *some* law—and I 'd advise
A man like you to wipe his eyes,

And square his jaws and start *ag'in*,
Fer jestice is a-goin' to win!"
And it was n't long tel his eyes had cleared
As blue as the skies, and the *sun* appeared
In the shape of a good old-fashioned smile
That I had n't seen fer a long, long while.

So we talked on fer a' hour er more,
And sunned ourselves in the open door,—
Tel a hoss-and-buggy down the road
Come a-drivin' up, that I guess John
knowed,—

Fer he winked and says, "I 'll dessap-
pear—
They 'd smell a mice ef they saw *me* here!"
And he thumbed his nose at the old gray
mare,
And hid hisse'f in the house somewhere.

Well.—The rig drove up: and I raised
my head
As old Jeff hollered to me and said
That "him and his old friend there had
come
To see ef the squire was at home."

. . . I told 'em "I was; and I *aimed* to be
At every chance of a weddin'-fee!"
And then I laughed—and they laughed,
too,—
Fer that was the object they had in view.
"Would I be on hands at eight that night?"
They ast: and 's-I, "You 're mighty right,
I'll be on hands!" And then I bu'st
Out a-laughin' my very wu'st,—
And so did they, as they wheeled away
And drove to'rds town in a cloud o' dust.
Then I shet the door, and me and John
Laughed and *laughed*, and jest *laughed* on,

Tel Mother drapped her specs, and *by*
Jeewhillikers! I thought she 'd *die!*—
And she could n't a-told, I 'll bet my hat,
What on earth she was laughin' at!

But all o' the fun o' the tale hain't done!—
Fer a drizzlin' rain had jest begun,
And a-havin' 'bout four mile' to ride,
I jest concluded I 'd better light
Out fer Jeff's and save my hide,—
Fer *it was a-goin' to storm, that night!*
So we went down to the barn, and John
Saddled my beast, and I got on;

And he told me somepin' to not ferget,
And when I left, he was *laughin'* yet.

And, 'proachin' on to my journey's end,
The great big draps o' the rain come down,
And the thunder growled in a way to lend
An awful look to the lowerin' frown
The dull sky wore; and the lightnin' glanced
Tel my old mare jest *more 'n* pranced,
And tossed her head, and bugged her eyes
To about four times their natchurl size,
As the big black lips of the clouds 'ud drap
Out some oath of a thunder-clap,

And threaten on in an undertone
That chilled a feller clean to the bone!

But I struck shelter soon enough
To save myse'f. And the house was
jammed
With the women-folks, and the weddin'-
stuff:—
A great, long table, fairly *crammed*
With big pound-cakes—and chops and
steaks—
And roasts and stews—and stumick-aches
Of every fashion, form, and size,
From twisters up to punkin-pies!

And candies, oranges, and figs,
And reezins,—all the "whilligigs"
And "jim-cracks" that the law allows
On sich occasions!—Bobs and bows
Of gigglin' girls, with corkscrew curls,
And fancy ribbons, reds and blues,
And "beau-ketchers" and "curliques"
To beat the world! And seven o'clock
Brought old Jeff;—and brought—*the groom*,—
With a sideboard-collar on, and stock
That choked him so, he had n't room

To *swaller* in, er even sneeze,
Er clear his th'oat with any ease
Er comfort — and a good square cough
Would saw his Adam's-apple off!

But as fer *Patience* — *My!* Oomh-
oomh! —
I never saw her look so sweet! —
Her face was cream and roses, too;
And then them eyes o' heavenly blue
Jest made an angel all complete!
And when she split 'em up in smiles
And splintered 'em around the room,
And danced acrost and met the groom,

And *laughed out loud*— It kind o' spiles
My language when I come to that—
Fer, as she laid away his hat,
Thinks I, "*The papers hid inside*
Of that said hat must make a bride
A happy one fer all her life,
Er else a *wrecked* and *wretched wife!*"

And, someway, then, I thought of *John*,—
Then looked to'rds *Patience*. . . . She
was *gone!*—
The door stood open, and the rain
Was dashin' in; and sharp and plain
Above the storm we heerd a cry—
A ringin', laughin', loud "Good-by!"
That died away, as fleet and fast
A hoss's hoofs went splashin' past!

And that was all. 'T was done that
quick! . . .
You 've heerd o' fellers "lookin' sick"?
I wisht you 'd seen *the groom* jest then —
I wisht you 'd seen them two old men,
With starin' eyes that fairly *glared*
At one another, and the scared
And empty faces of the crowd,—
I wisht you could a-been allowed
To jest look on and see it all,—
And heerd the girls and women bawl

And wring their hands; and heerd old
Jeff
A-cussin' as he swung hisse'f
Upon his hoss, who champed his bit
As though old Nick had holt of it:
And cheek by jowl the two old wrecks
Rode off as though they 'd break their
necks.

And as we all stood starin' out
Into the night, I felt the brush
Of some one's hand, and turned about,
And heerd a voice that whispered,
"*Hush!*—

They 're waitin' in the kitchen, and

You 're wanted. Don't you understand? ''

Well, ef my *memory* serves me now,

I think I winked.—Well, anyhow,

I left the crowd a-gawkin' there,

And jest slipped off around to where

The back-door opened, and went in,

And turned and shet the door ag'in,

And mayby *locked* it—could n't swear, –

A woman's arms around me makes

Me liable to make mistakes.—

I read a marriage license nex',

But as I did n't have my specs

I jest *inferred* it was all right,
And tied the knot so mortal-tight
That Patience and my old friend John
Was safe enough from that time on!

.

Well now I might go on and tell
How all the joke at last leaked out,
And how the youngsters raised the yell
And rode the happy groom about
Upon their shoulders; how the bride
Was kissed a hunderd times beside
The one *I* give her,—tel she cried
And laughed untel she like to died!

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I might go on and tell you all
About the supper—and the *ball.*—
You 'd ought to see me twist my heel
Through jest one old Furginny reel
Afore you die! er tromp the strings
Of some old fiddle tel she sings
Some old cowtillion, don't you know,
That putts the devil in yer toe!
We kep' the dancin' up tel *four*
O'clock, I reckon—mayby more.—
We hardly heerd the thunder's roar,
Er *thought* about the *storm* that blowed—
And them two fellers on the road!

Tel all at onc't we heerd the door
Bu'st open, and a voice that *swore*,—
And old Jeff Thompson tuck the floor.
He shuck hisse'f and looked around
Like some old dog about half-drown'd—
His hat, I reckon, *weighed ten pound*
To say the least, and I 'll say, *shore*,
His *overcoat weighed fifty* more—
The wettest man you ever saw,
To have so dry a son-in-law!
He sized it all; and Patience laid
Her hand in John's, and looked afraid,
And waited. And a stiller set
O' folks, I *know*, you never met

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In any court-room, where with dread
They wait to hear a verdick read.
The old man turned his eyes on me:
"And have you married 'em?" says he.
I nodded "Yes." "Well, that 'll do,"
He says, "and now we 're th'ough with
you,—
You jest clear out, and I decide
And promise to be satisfied!"
He had n't nothin' more to say.
I saw, of course, how matters lay,
And left. But as I rode away
I heerd the roosters crow fer day.